

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of February 3, 2021
Planning Commission Meeting

In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm by Chair Hill-Eubanks.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Commissioners Laura Hill-Eubanks, Ruth Ruttenberg, Nancy Peck and Chandra Blackmer. Aaron Rhodes was absent. Also present were Clerk Mitch Osiecki; Clare Rock of the CVRPC and Sarah Wolfe, Patrick Meehan, and Wilkinson Keeley, all representing the Northfield Energy Committee.

Public Participation: Introductions were made and guests were welcomed to the meeting.

Set/Adjust Agenda: None

Energy Committee Updates: Sarah Wolfe made a brief presentation, highlighting recent goals and priorities the Energy Committee has been focused on. Topics of interest include:

- Locating an EV charging station somewhere in town;
- Identify a site on which to perform an energy audit;
- Establish a public transit kiosk/commuter bus stop;
- Facilitate a discussion about solar arrays.

Comment from Ruth Ruttenberg: NU regularly undertakes energy efficiency programs. Has there been any outreach to see if there might be opportunities to collaborate?

Also, Ruttenberg feels there are likely a number of people in the community who are personally interested in exploring the feasibility of EV or hybrid vehicles, but could use advice. Any thoughts where people might turn to for advice or information on this topic?

Sarah responded that there are resources available with info about EV's. Perhaps not as much info is available right now about hybrids, but more info on those vehicles should be available soon.

The Energy Committee is actively researching potential sites for EV charging stations.

What does Northfield currently own in terms of a municipal vehicles?

Mostly municipal vehicles are highway department or public safety (police, fire, EMT vehicles). Also, one vehicle used by the utility department to read meters.

There has also been talk of a siting a Park & Ride in the downtown. Any developments on that?

Response: Only general conversations at this point.

Question from Nancy Peck: The state has set aside a pool of money to support residential weatherization projects. Are municipal buildings eligible for these funds?

Response: The money set aside for residential weatherization projects is intended to be targeted specifically for low- to moderate-income residential projects. There are other funds that could be used to support weatherization improvements on municipal buildings.

Comment raised that there have been past conversations about developing a municipal solar project somewhere in town. Any movement on this?

Response: There have been periodic discussions, but a viable project has not yet materialized.

PC thanked the members of the EC for taking the time to meet.

Zoning Regulation Review:

Clare Rock of the CVRPC joined the meeting to discuss zoning regulation updates.

Clare shared some general thoughts on aligning zoning regulations with the Town Plan. Specific thoughts include encouraging development in the higher density residential, village center, commercial, and mixed-use districts. Also, streamline regulations to simplify the permit review process, and identify areas where current language is vague or confusing.

The Town Plan specifically discusses future land use goals & policies. Zoning regulations should support the vision of the Town Plan.

Might wish to consider changes to permitted uses in the downtown to allow a mix of housing on the upper floors of commercial spaces. The PC might also consider creating a smaller to target specific development to a particular space.

In some cases, it might be desirable to remove conditional use approval, and require only site plan review.

Could also allow increased density in targeted areas.

Comment from Ruttenberg: previous zoning regulation updates focused on reducing the number of zoning districts. Feels there might be pushback should the PC try to reverse course on this.

A tool/resource to explore:

Vermont Planning Information Center (VPIC) tools for subdivision regulations. See: www.vpic.info

ACT 143 – On-Farm Accessory Businesses

Discussion of the difference between site plan review and conditional use review.

Site Plan Review: the focus is on the physical layout of the site (property boundaries, location of structures on the parcel, traffic flow, etc.)

Conditional Use Review: what are the external impacts of the proposed development? Will the proposed project result in excessive noise, odors, etc. that could have adverse impacts beyond the physical boundary of the project (affecting neighboring properties)?

Should consider whether current subdivision regulations provide sufficient oversight of proposed development.

Planned Unit Development (PUD): Might wish to revise language to provide better guidance to developers. PUD's are intended to promote flexible, creative development, including providing additional forms of affordable housing.

Ideally, PUD's should preserve the allowable uses within zoning districts, and can be used to allow additional uses, as well.

Home Occupations (section 4.03)

Some overlap in defined allowable "customary uses."

Child Care Home or Facility (section 4.12)

Suggestion: remove requirement for conditional use review. Towns often allow child care facilities serving six or fewer children to be approved administratively (no site plan review). Facilities serving more than six children would require a site plan review.

Signs (section 4.14)

Language currently addresses content of signs. Regulations should address only size and number of signs, not content. Regulating content of signs is quite possibly unenforceable.

Floodplain Regulations

No references to setbacks. Recommendation: should show a flood overlay district.

Approval of Minutes: Ruttenberg moved to approve minutes of January 6, 2021; Blackmer seconded.

Motion carried 3-0-0. Peck lost her connection and did not reconnect for the last few minutes of the meeting.

Next Regular Meeting: March 3, 2021 at 7:00pm.

Conservation Commission will likely participate

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.